

## History of Design: Illuminated Manuscript Handout

The word 'manuscript' comes from the Latin '*handwritten*'. Before paper was available, vellum was used to write on. Vellum is made from stretched and treated animal skins. A large manuscript might require one whole cow or sheep-skin to make a folded sheet of two to four pages, and a thick book could require the entire herd. Thus making manuscripts and books costly.

Most manuscripts were created for the public or private devotion. This production was continued till the added decoration of 'illumination', making the work even more treasured. The word 'illumination' comes from the latin origin for '*light up*' or '*enlightened*'. This attributes to the use of gold to silver embellishments and bright colours to decorate initial letters and page borders to portray scenes. The practice of illumination dates back to the sixth century and continued into the Middle Ages. Illuminations comes in different sizes and ways. They were used to indicate divisions in a text, to narrate stories, emplyfy beauty and visual representations of texts. Thus making the manuscript even more alluring and memorable. It is also usually used for religion purposes. For example, most illuminated bibles share four similar characteristics: Initials, incipit pages, carpet pages and portraits of the gospel Evangelists.

The art of illumination slowed down after the invention of printing press in mid-fifteenth century, however many ancient manuscripts have survived the intervening centuries and are displayed in libraries and museums worldwide.

### Who?

Illuminated manuscripts were first produced by monks in abbeys. The production was commercialized when it became more popular. The laymen were making a living by making these illuminated manuscripts. In the 12th to 13th centuries, illuminated manuscripts were supplied to noblemen, the new middle class, students and professors due to the rise of universities. During the Renaissance period, some well-known painters worked on the illuminated manuscripts as well. Such as Gerard David, Simon Bening, and Antonio Pisano. Eventually, it was made in partnerships in major cities, such as London, Paris, and Rome. This led to the reason why most of the later illuminated manuscripts contain different styles.

## THE MAKING PROCESS

### Material Used

During the ancient times, Greeks and Egyptians used papyrus as a material for scrolls. However, it is not a good material for bounded books as it was too fragile. Later on a new material, parchment, was adopted thus changed the whole production. It provided a smoother surface for writing and applying pigments. With the new adoption, the presentation of the biblical texts became more formal with clear layout, beautifully written calligraphy and painted illustrations.

### Preparing the Material

First, the skin of the sheeps, goats or calves are soaked in lime-water, with the hair gently removed from the skin. Then it is soaked in water to remove the essences of lime. The skin is stretched out, scraped to produce a smoother and even surface. The skin is removed from the frame and cut into the desired size, once they dried. The tip of the quill is shaped into a proper size depending on the style of the letters. There are various materials used for the ink, such as gallnut and carbon substances. If there were any error, the ink can be scraped off as the parchment is resilient. The painting and decoration only starts after finishing the written script. The pigments are made from blends of ingredients such as plants, minerals, egg white, and elements such as mercury, cinnabar and etc. It is also decorated with gold ink or gold leaf which is made by mixing powdered gold with glue, known as 'shell' gold. Gold is commonly pasted to gum and rubbed with polished stone or an animal's tooth. The use of gold shows the value of the texts in the Christian context. Illuminated manuscripts were costly and time consuming to produce, thus only those of significance could afford them. The folded parchments are sewn together with support, called leather thongs, then covered with leather and wooden plates. The binding and the cover of the manuscripts can be decorated with gold, metal, silk, leather or sculpted metal depending on the wealth of the patrons, and the type of manuscripts.

## LAYOUT

### **Composition**

The composition of an illuminated manuscript consists a few key elements.

Namely, the handwritten text, initials, borders, margins, miniatures and the Golden Cannon (layout). Technically, illuminated manuscripts had to contain gold and silver leaves. However due to common usage of the term, it refers to any decorated manuscript from the western traditions.

The specific method of which the elements of the illuminated manuscript were arranged is known as Tschichold's Golden Section. The page is divided into ninths with a printed page proportion of 2:3. The height of the text was approximately the width of the page. The margins were fixed at 1/9 of the paper width for inner margin, 1/9 for the top, 2/9 for the outer margin and 2/9 for the bottom margin which decreased in size upon trimming. Substantial margins were left on all sides, to be used later for corrections and decorations. The type area and paper size were proportionate to each other. Before the text was laid down, guides were made by inscribing lines with a dry point or drawn with lead and sometimes were left visible. Holes were pricked at the sides of the pages to measure the distance between text lines.

### **Decoration**

The decoration of the books performed various functions. It was used to enhance the aesthetic nature of the manuscript and to also add value to them. Cheaper books had pages made of skins that were not as high quality as those made for those that were considered more important. The animals hairs were not properly removed, which resulted a grey tone to the paper and blemishes from where the sheep/calf has been attacked by a predator created an uneven surface. Upon sanding, the scar tissue on these skins would tear and form holes as they were thinner than other parts of the parchment. In addition they were not adorned with expensive metals or inks. Diminuendo was used to aid literacy as it helped the reader find his way around the book. It also provides more contexts via the miniatures which depicts scenes that are related to the narrative. Further, Initials and borders created text division to organize and indicate important sections of the work.

### **Initials**

There are a few methods to decorate and incorporate a design into the presentation of initials. One way was through rubrications, which is to highlight the initials in red or blue ink, which would help it stand out amongst the black text. The size of the initial could also be made larger than other letters in width and in height. The initials were also elaborated with pen work flourishes in red and blue ink. In some situations the flourishes would form various objects, like the vines of a flower or a human face.

Inhabited, historiated and anthropomorphic initials are three different types of initials. Inhabited initials contained the heads or faces of an animals, humans, grotesques or full representations of unknown people, animals or plants. Historiated initials contain a narrative scene and a number of identifiable figures from the text. Anthropomorphic Initials incorporate all or part of the human body into the structure of a letter within a manuscript.

### **Borders**

Borders were used in manuscripts to frame the text and lend coherence to the page. They were made using pigment and gold and drawn in pen work. Elements can include stylized and naturalistic *foliate* drawings, (flowers, ivy, leaves, buds), geometric shapes. They could be full or partial and frame the left, right, upper and lower margins and also appear between two columns of text on the page. In more expensive manuscripts borders would appear on every page, but in less splendid books they may appear only on the first page of the volume to introduce each new text.

### **Miniatures**

Miniature is another term for the illuminated illustrations which are not connected to other parts of the book's decorative design. In luxury books, the miniatures were enjoyed for their aesthetic beauty. Some were illustrative, providing a commentary on the text or deepening the readers' understanding of its contents. The miniatures also reflected the power of the patron who had commissioned the volume, for instance, by using elements from a coat of arms. These are crests found on soldiers' armours and shields whereby each design component within the crest represents an accomplishment of the soldier. In devotional manuscripts they act as an aid to contemplation or meditation. Miniatures also contain common iconography.

Figures such as biblical characters and saints could be recognised by the way they were depicted or the object they are depicted with. For example, the Virgin Mary is conventionally depicted wearing blue; St Peter carries the keys of Heaven and Hell; St Catherine is shown with the wheel on which she was martyred; and the four Evangelists are represented by a winged man (St Matthew), a winged lion (St Mark), a winged ox (St Luke), and an eagle (St John).

## **EXAMPLES OF ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS**

### **The Book of Durrow (650-700 AD)**

The Book of Durrow is known to be the earliest medieval illustrated manuscript in Ireland. It is written in Latin and contains the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). The book establishes the calligraphic technique of using large initial capital letters and the use of “*diminuendo*”, which began a century earlier in the Cathach manuscript. It is a type arrangement in which a large letter or word starts at a point and leads the eye to smaller words. Each gospel usually begins with two full pages of illustration: a large evangelist symbol on one page and a carpet decor page on another. The illustration in the Book of Durrow shows how Celts use Early Christian Art (*also called Insular Art*). It is the first to portray a new style of fusion between Paganism and Christianity. The embellished decorations inspired subsequent illuminated manuscripts, including the famous Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels.

### **The Lindisfarne Gospels (715- 720 AD)**

This manuscript is feasibly the best known copy to survive the upcoming periods. The book’s significance is manifested in the evidence of its production, illustration and the use of added gloss on text during the late 10th century, which is the earliest rendering of the Gospels in English.

### **The Book of Kells (~800 AD)**

The Book of Kells was created in the monastery of Kells, Ireland. The Celtic Christians produced this illuminated Latin manuscript for the purpose of religious art and ceremonial use. It displays the traditions of Christianity and was written by 3 different scribes, 4 artists. The book was made from the finest calf vellum and painted with inks from around the world. It illustrates designs that are “*convoluted, ornate, sinuous, and dream-like in their complexity*”. The style of the book is characterized by geometric design, large areas of color and complicated interlaced patterns. The most recognized page is known as *Chi Rho*, which were the first letters of the word Christ in Ancient Greek. The page is covered in a swirling, almost psychedelic design, with extremely elaborate patterns in minute detail.

### **The Book of Hours (Late medieval, 16th Century)**

The Book of Hours was used mostly for private devotion. They were often personalized for individual patrons and designed with small illustrations highlighted in gold and rich primary colors depicting the life of Christ, Virgin Mary, and individual saints. It is decorated with headings and paragraph marks in blue and red ink, and written in Roman letters. Both the text and the illuminations are ascribed to the Parisian workshop of Geoffroy Tory. Some of the greatest paintings and drawings of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance are found in these pages.

### **Islamic Manuscripts**

Islamic Manuscripts illustrate Muhammad's teachings that is recorded in the Quran. Thousands of manuscripts were made in various sizes, from pocket-sized to luxuriously decorated imperial editions. Muhammad allowed his followers to learn, read and write. Thus developing and advancing calligraphy skills into a tool for the religion and government. Many of the calligraphers and scholars are female due to Muhammad's advocacy for women. The manuscript libraries were larger in Islamic regions than in Europe, as the books are highly appreciated in Islamic cultures. However, figurative illustrations were not contained in the manuscripts, due to the belief that only God could create life and mortals should not make figures or images that might be seen as ‘idols’. This is a strict rule in many Muslim regions, for example North Africa and Egypt.

## **KEY INFLUENCES**

### **Functions and Uses**

The Gospel book was the most important text which aided the spread of Christianity. Decorative manuscripts were displayed near altars, in full view of the church. They were also displayed during feast days and special processions. It came in a variety of formats suited for different uses. Varieties of manuscripts include: *Scholarly Editions, Evangelical and Decorative purposes.*

### **Patrons of Illumination**

Monasteries produced manuscripts for their own use, the heavily illuminated ones were reserved for liturgical use. In the early period, manuscripts were often commissioned by rulers for their own personal use or as diplomatic gifts. Especially after the Book of Hours, wealthy individuals commissioned works as a sign of status within the community. While the process of creating an illuminated manuscript did not change, the move from monasteries to commercial settings was a radical step, which paved ways for the advances in printing methods.

### **A Step Forward ( The invention of Printing )**

Johann Gutenberg's invention of printing with movable type in the mid-fifteenth century radically changed book production. In Paris, a printing press was installed at the Sorbonne around 1470. In the late 1480s, commercial editors began specializing in the lucrative production of printed Book of Hours, and established illuminators were paid to provide designs to illustrate printed books.

### **Shapers of Modern Graphic Designers**

The scribes and monks in the scriptoriums were technically the first modern graphic designers. Out of their creativity, we gained the art of calligraphy, columned layouts, illustrated initials and the evolution of bookmaking and layout design.

Serif typefaces, especially gothic and roman style are a direct inspiration from these decorated works of art. Origins of leadings and kernings can be traced back to these manuscripts. Decorated initials are still used in some children books or modern versions of the classic illuminated letters. Novelty typefaces are sometimes inspired by these ancient relics and bare resemblance to the not so lost art of illumination. Instead of the use of an entire page of texts, the evolution in the illuminated manuscripts saw the development of columns and margins. The spacing of the text into specific columns with perfect edges was the handmade version of the justified text layout.

### **Development of Fonts**

The art of fine writing was appreciated during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. A notable amount of scripts were known for their beautiful and decorative aesthetics. Following into the introduction of printing, fine writing was still taught by calligraphers and illuminators. They continued to produce handwritten pieces as works of art for commemorative and display purposes.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the 6th century until the invention of printing by Johann Gutenberg, books were initially handmade by monks in abbeys, to being commercialized in major cities. The adoption of the new material, parchment allowed the calligrapher and illustrators to curate their works. The biblical texts were well organized and enhanced using calligraphy, illustration, and lavish materials for different religious, social and political purposes. The development of layout and illustrations of an illuminated manuscript is still in use to this very day. The scribes and monks in the scriptoriums were most likely the first modern graphic designers, who used illustrations to tell stories and created the visual hierarchy.